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Benefaction, processing, exclusion: documentary representations of refugees and migrants in Fortress Europe

Thomas Austin
University of Sussex, UK

Abstract

This essay examines representations of migrants and asylum seekers in some recent documentaries, largely made by white Europeans. I pay particular attention to questions of agency, voice and individuation, and the mediation, distribution, or evacuation of these elements of subjectivity. In contrast to the indifference or outright hostility with which migrants and refugees have often been treated, a well-intentioned but Eurocentric trope, evident in *Ode to Lesbos*, is the attempt made by 'ordinary' citizens to offer hospitality to those arriving at the continent's borders. On the other hand, *Les Sauteurs* (Those Who Jump) presents migrants' own actions as in part a form of political resistance. Finally, I consider how Gianfranco Rosi's *Fuocoammare* (Fire at Sea) and Thomas Østbye's *Imagining Emanuel* interrogate the scrutiny, discipline and control endured by asylum seekers and migrants, processes that form part of the unmarked and unremarked upon Žižekian 'objective violence' that sustains the European system. These documentaries also offer reminders of the common technologies and routine procedures shared by filmmakers and the modern state's legal apparatus, as both test veracity and attempt to produce the human subject as knowable.

Keywords

Refugees
Migrants
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Documentary

Article = 8766 words including notes

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The figure of the refugee in the 21st century has been constructed across political, humanitarian and journalistic discourses as an ambivalent figure. Both “a risky subject” and a “subject at risk”, s/he is “simultaneously, a *sufferer* of geo-political conflict, and a *threat* to the Westphalian, nation-based, global order” (Tazzioli 2018, 9; Chouliaraki 2012, 14).¹ As neoliberalism and austerity escalate economic and social insecurity, and the sovereignty of nation states is eroded by globalisation, refugees (readily conflated with economic migrants and “illegal immigrants” in the language of politicians and commentators)² have been repeatedly blamed for these uncertainties. In an analysis of the “Haiderization of Europe” and the rise of right-wing populism espousing revisionist history, nativist chauvinism, xenophobia and anti-immigration rhetoric, Ruth Wodak cites the 1973 Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity, which enshrines “social justice [and] respect for human rights”. She notes that “these values have unfortunately been backgrounded, possibly even forgotten” in the renationalizing tendencies of the past 20 years (Wodak 2013, 7).³ During the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015-16, when more than a million people sought asylum in European Union countries, politicians such as Viktor Orbán and David Cameron used dehumanising language to label them as “unknown masses” and a “swarm” threatening to engulf the continent.⁴ As Prem Kumar Rajaram has noted, a prevalent Eurocentric perspective on these events holds that “it is Europe that has had the ‘difficult year’, not migrants.” (Rajaram 2016, 2)⁵ For Slavoj Žižek, the increasing numbers of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants trying to reach Europe are not simply responding to particular instances of war, famine or environmental disaster. Their movements are ultimately the result of “a radical class division across the entire globe”. Žižek (2016, 6) characterises Europe and the global north as “a self-enclosed globe separating its privileged Inside from its Outside”: “[C]apitalism’s global reach is grounded in the way it introduces a radical class division across the entire globe, separating those

¹ The Westphalian doctrine of state sovereignty is based on the treaty signed to end the Thirty Years’ War in 1648.

² Ruben Andersson comments: “*illegal immigrant* [is] pejorative, stigmatizing, and even incorrect, implying as it does that migrants are criminals when they have usually only committed an administrative infraction. While the creeping criminalization of migration is changing this, *illegal* remains insidious when used to label *people* rather than actions. [...] I will use the term *clandestine migration* for [...] its relative neutrality” (Andersson, 2014, 17, 290n, italics in original).

³ “Haiderization” refers to the political success of Jorg Haider’s right-wing Austrian Freedom Party in the 1990s and 2000s.

⁴ “In 2015, 1,255,600 first time asylum seekers applied for international protection in the Member States of the European Union (EU), a number more than double that of the previous year. The number of Syrians [...] has doubled [...] to reach 362,800, while the number of Afghans has almost quadrupled to 178,200 and that of Iraqis has multiplied by 7 to 121,500. They represent the three main citizenships of first time asylum applicants [...] accounting for more than half of all first time applicants.” “Record number of over 1.2 million first time asylum seekers registered in 2015,” Eurostat newsrelease, 4 March 2016. David Cameron, television interview ITV, 30 July 2015, available at: <http://www.itv.com/news/update/2015-07-30/pm-a-swarm-of-migrants-want-to-come-to-britain/>; Viktor Orbán, ‘Orbán Viktor sajtótájékoztatója az Európai Tanács ülését követően’ (Viktor Orbán’s Press Conference following the European Council’s meeting), Government of Hungary, 21 February 2016, www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-sajtotajekoztatoja-az-europai-tanacs-uleset-kovetoen, cited in Rajaram 2016, 4. Nicholas De Genova notes that, despite Orbán’s aggressive rhetoric, the Hungarian authorities have vacillated “between vicious violence and begrudging complicity [...] in the face of the veritable intractability of migrant and refugee movements” (De Genova 2017, 13).

⁵ In addition, as Nicholas De Genova has argued, grouping heterogeneous individuals under the collective rubric of ‘migrants’ as objects of study constitutes “epistemic violence” to the complexity of their lived experiences (De Genova 2002, cited in Andersson 2014, 12).

protected by the sphere from those vulnerable outside it.” In contrast to the beneficiaries of globalisation, the mobility of this highly vulnerable global demographic comes at the price of deracination, violence and trauma. Figured in manifold ways across the European media sphere, these “absolute Others to the dream of a mobile world” (Andersson 2014, 4) have elicited sympathy, pity, resentment and rage. In this essay I examine representations of migrants and asylum seekers in some recent documentaries largely made by white Europeans. I pay particular attention to questions of agency, voice and individuation, and the mediation, distribution, or evacuation of these elements of subjectivity.⁶

During the 1990s and 2000s the relaxation of internal borders within an enlarging European Union was accompanied by the hardening and militarization of external frontiers.⁷ This was accompanied by a gradual merging of a humanitarian agenda on refugees with a disciplinary and regulatory one that often grouped them with unwelcome migrants. In his investigation of the south west quadrant of Europe’s border regime, the anthropologist Ruben Andersson coins the term “illegal migration industry – or ‘illegality industry’ for short” to describe a “*system* in which illegal migration is both controlled and produced”. This “infernal production line” tracks, rescues, detains, reports on, and increasingly criminalizes migrants from (and in) Africa in particular (Andersson 2014, 3, 12, *italics in original*).⁸ Andersson examines “the illegality industry’s three principal fields on the frontline – policing and patrolling, caring and rescuing, and observing and knowing” and traces how “the business of bordering Europe now thrives well beyond the confines of the continent’s geographical borders” through “externalisation” agreements (Andersson 2014, 13, 3, 41).⁹ Similarly, in *Fortress Europe: Inside the War on Immigration* Matthew Carr (2015, 38-43, 51, 64, 76) details the construction of a “gated continent” guarded by an extensive border enforcement programme extending to ‘partner’ states such as Morocco, Libya and the Ukraine.¹⁰ Carr writes: “At no time in history have so many people attempted to cross international borders without authorization, and at no time have so many governments gone to such lengths to try to stop them.” He notes: “To some extent [...] the confrontation between Europe and its unwanted intruders is specific to Europe; but it is also a reflection of a much wider phenomenon.” (2015, 7)¹¹ It is necessary to clarify this

⁶ This article forms part of a larger project on the politics of immigration in European fiction films and documentaries of the past 30 years. I will also look beyond films authored by politically engaged white Europeans to those made by immigrants and refugees telling their own stories.

⁷ The Schengen agreement of 1985 to relax border controls between France, Germany and the Benelux countries was incorporated into EU law in 1997 although, as Matthew Carr notes, “not all the countries in the [now enlarged] Schengen area are members of the EU and not all members of the EU belong to Schengen”. (Carr, 2015, 28).

⁸ On the “many entanglements between military and humanitarian measures” see also Tazzioli 2018, 6. This increasingly technologized and expensive regime of monitoring and control can be considered another example of what Naomi Klein has called “disaster capitalism”, whereby disasters and catastrophic events are treated as “exciting market opportunities” for private companies seeking profits in humanitarian and security initiatives that were once the exclusive domain of state institutions or NGOs. (Klein 2008, 6).

⁹ Writing in 2014, Andersson (5-6) makes the point that “The political impact of the ‘boat people’ approaching Europe’s southern borders, greatly surpasses their actual numbers” and asks: “why have such massive efforts been expended to target black Africans in the borderlands, and what racial and colonial legacies underpin these efforts?”.

¹⁰ In March 2016 Turkey became a vital new partner in the EU’s refugee and immigration policy. Elizabeth Collett (2016) notes: “[T]he agreement aims to address the overwhelming flow of smuggled migrants and asylum seekers traveling across the Aegean from Turkey to the Greek islands by allowing Greece to return to Turkey ‘all new irregular migrants’ arriving after March 20. In exchange, EU Member States will increase resettlement of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey, accelerate visa liberalization for Turkish nationals, and boost existing financial support for Turkey’s refugee population.”

¹¹ Daniel Trilling (2018) writes: “Although the [global] proportion of migrants has not grown significantly [in recent decades, what has changed is] the origin and direction of migration. [...] people are leaving a much wider range of countries than ever before, and they are heading to a much narrower range of destinations

wider context for changes in policy and attitudes across Europe and beyond. In 2004, Zygmunt Baumann argued that voters' and governments' negative and often violent reactions to refugees and immigrants, commonly viewed as "strangers in our midst", were in part an indirect response to the social and economic upheaval and insecurity created by globalization (Bauman 2004, 66). When viewed more than a decade later, following the Brexit vote of 2016 and the election of President Trump, his analysis appears highly prescient:

Uncertainty and the anguish born of uncertainty are globalization's staple products. State powers can do next to nothing to placate, let alone quash uncertainty. The most they can do is to refocus it on objects within reach; shift it from the objects they can do nothing about to those they can least make a show of being able to handle and control. Refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants — the waste products of globalization — fit the bill perfectly. [...] Seeking in vain for other, more adequate outlets, fears and anxieties rub off on targets close to hand and re-emerge as popular resentment and fear of the 'aliens nearby'. Uncertainty cannot be defused or dispersed in a direct confrontation with the other embodiment of extraterritoriality; the global elite drifting beyond the reach of human control. That elite is much too powerful to be confronted [...] Refugees, on the other hand, are a clearly visible, and sitting, target for the surplus anguish.

Recent outpourings of resentment and hostility towards refugees and immigrants throughout Europe also need to be understood as one facet of an extensive system of violence, past and present, that has been constitutive of the European project. This includes systemic and less visible acts of violence which Žižek has termed "objective violence": "the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" (Žižek 2008,9, 1-2). For Žižek (2008,9, 1,10), "objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this 'normal' style of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent [...] that is] violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent." Rajaram (2016, 4) develops a complementary argument, drawing on the work of Fanon, Bhabha and Said to emphasise the importance of the cultural and symbolic sphere in this system of dominance:

The European project is [...] colonial not only because colonialism was the condition that allowed for its economic and political emergence, and not only because of its entrenchment in neo-imperialist political economies that generate global insecurities and displacements, but also because of [the discursive] attribution of fullness [to Europe] and the readiness to juxtapose lack elsewhere.¹²

Nowhere is this binary between plentitude and lack clearer than in figurations of *identity*, which condense notions of security, belonging and entitlement on the one hand, contrasted with precarity, aspiration, and subjection to scrutiny and regulation on the other. Such questions inform the key problematics in the documentary films under consideration here.

than ever before. They are going to the places where power and wealth have become concentrated. Europe, and north-west Europe in particular, is one of those places."

¹² On manifold interfaces between colonialism and capitalism dating back to the late 15th century, see Patel and Moore, 2018.

Self-representation or benefaction: *Les Sauteurs* and *Ode to Lesbos*

Migrants' experiences are traced in *The Land Between* (2014), shot by David Fedele on Morocco's Gourougou mountain outside the city of Melilla, the notorious Spanish enclave where, across three nights in 2005, hundreds of male migrants tried to scale security fences and were repelled by Spanish and Moroccan forces.¹³ The film focuses on some of the hundreds of sub-Saharan African migrants living in makeshift camps in the mountains. The poverty and tedium of their lives is manifest in footage of them cooking, mending tents, or playing draughts with bottle tops. Yacou, a former farmer and self-described "clandestine" and "adventurer", tells of leaving Mali because droughts had destroyed his livelihood. Having spent two years subsisting in the mountains, scavenging food from Moroccans' rubbish, being assaulted and robbed by police and local bandits, he is considering returning to Mali but cannot quite abandon the dream of a new life in Spain or Germany. As Andersson (2014, 19) writes of postcolonial Africa: "Europe [is] rendered as a mythical repository of wealth and transformative power." However, Yacou comments: "Once you have entered Morocco it's like you have entered a jail. [...] on the road you must be armed with patience, will, endurance and forgiveness." Later he shows the remains of a police raid on the camp, in which tents, clothes and blankets were torched. A Cameroonian tells of a group attempt on the fence which led to beatings from the Moroccan military and the death of his friend. Another man, filmed mending a shoe, comments: "They will sell our images and use us to make money. They make money on our suffering." By including this scene, Fedele registers his own participation in what Andersson (2014, 10) terms "the industry that has grown up around the illegal immigrant", one that encompasses journalists and aid workers as well as security personnel.¹⁴

Les Sauteurs (Those Who Jump) (2016) addresses a similar topic but approaches the extractive nature of documentary rather differently. The film is co-directed by Abou Bakar Sidibé, Moritz Siebert, and Estephan Wagner. Sidibé, a former teacher from Mali, had been living on Gourougou for a year when he met Siebert and Wagner, who gave him a small camera and some money (so he wasn't tempted to sell it), and asked him to shoot everyday life among the migrants. After three months of filming and making further attempts to scale the fences, he finally arrived in Melilla. His voiceover was recorded in Berlin, where he is currently waiting for his asylum claim to be processed. The film is not just a chronicle of one man's experience, but also frames the 'jumpers' as part of a mass act of political resistance. Sidibé comments in voiceover: "You [Europeans] can't take everything from us [Africans] and then tell us to stay outside."

In contrast to the indifference or outright hostility with which migrants and refugees have often been treated, a common trope in European film representations, both fictional and documentary, is the attempt made by 'ordinary' citizens to offer hospitality and succour to those arriving at the continent's borders. A striking example of the Eurocentrism of this well-intentioned but problematic tendency, in which refugees and asylum seekers are marginalised or even evacuated entirely from a narrative of European benefaction, is provided by the short film *Ode to Lesbos* (2016). This four-minute documentary celebrating islanders who were nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize after aiding refugees arriving by

¹³ See Carr 2015, 1-3, 51-65. Laia Soto Bermant argues that Melilla is just one example of a process whereby "the constitution of labor migration as a security problem has led to the normalization of unlawful practices in border enforcement". But she also notes that "the [porous] border of Melilla functions as both a barrier and a conduit [for smuggled goods]." Bermant 2017, 124, 126.

¹⁴ Andersson notes repatriated Senegalese migrants' resentment of NGO workers and journalists and researchers "who take our stories". (2014, 48). Just as Andersson acknowledges his own participation in the illegality industry, so I acknowledge mine and that of the filmmakers discussed here.

sea was *directed by Syrian exile Talal Derki*, with funding from a surprising source, global whisky brand Johnny Walker.¹⁵ The ultimately positive tone of the film is signaled by the advertising trade journal *Campaign*: “Johnny Walker Storyline collaborates with writers, directors, filmmakers and photographers to produce work that ‘gives real people a voice to tell their stories of progress’.”¹⁶ The fishermen and elderly women interviewed in the film are indeed given a voice, telling in understated terms their stories of rescue, care and gratitude. But the thousands of refugees who arrived on the island are elided, absent from both image and soundtrack. Instead, images of abandoned lifebelts function as a metonym for their dangerous journey and manifest the scale of their numbers. *Ode to Lesbos* opens with an underwater shot looking upwards at seven lifebelts drifting on the surface, followed by a small mountain of hundreds of orange and blue lifebelts discarded on the grass and extending away from the camera towards the horizon. **(*pic)** A voiceover in Greek declares: “All these lifebelts were worn by people. There were thousands every day.” The use of the past tense here, and in other interviews, aligned with carefully framed and painterly shots of a village and its tiny harbour, imply that the temporary “crisis” is over, an urgent but finite event, after which life on the island has returned to normal. This trajectory is also adumbrated by the score, which shifts from a plaintive piano to a more cheerful melody backed by stirring strings.

The reward for those islanders involved in helping the refugees is a feeling of enhanced self-worth. As one elderly woman who helped wash and iron refugees’ clothes says: “It’s satisfying when you do a good deed.” Similar emotions can be enjoyed indirectly by audiences moved by a sense of pity, sympathy, and contentment that the ‘right thing’ has been done. Luc Boltanski (1999, xiii) has termed this dynamic the ‘topic of sentiment’, whereby the spectator is moved to pity or gratitude by the distant, mediated suffering of a fellow human being: “tender-heartedness consists in ‘feeling oneself in one’s fellow man’ [sic], in recognising in a gesture of ‘humanity’ ‘the common interest’ which links the one it touches to others.” Yet the film’s inability to give the refugees voice or subjectivity results in what Patricia Zimmermann (2000, 62) would call “stagnant empathy”. They remain anonymous, the silent and invisible recipients of hospitality, excluded from both visual frame and soundtrack. Symbolically expelled, “sub-citizens”¹⁷ devoid of any political subjectivity, with no consideration given to the causes of their flight or what will happen to them next, they are contrasted with the islanders, the active agents of European benefaction. Instead of understanding, *Ode to Lesbos* provides its viewers with emotional catharsis, offering a vicarious instance of what Lilie Chouliaraki (2012, 24) calls “solidarity as self-fulfillment”, which “construes our action on refugees as the realisation of our own humanity whilst keeping the humanity of the refugee out of view”.¹⁸

¹⁵ The film is presumably a part of Johnny Walker’s corporate social responsibility programme. The Nobel nomination was for islanders of Lesbos, Kos, Chíos, Samos, Rhodes and Leros. “[Lesbos] has a population of about 90,000, yet saw almost 450,000 refugees pass through during 2015.” (Nianias 2016). <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/jan/05/refugees-in-lesbos-are-there-too-many-ngos-on-the-island>. The sympathetic response celebrated in *Ode to Lesbos* was criticised by some islanders on the grounds that the huge influx of refugees was threatening the island’s tourist trade.

¹⁶ <http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/johnnie-walker-ode-lesvos-johnnie-walker-storyline/1409861#>

¹⁷ Hyndman 2000, cited in Chouliaraki 2012, 15. For 2018 situation, see Sebastain Leape, “Greece has the means to help refugees on Lesons - but does it have the will?” *Guardian*, 13 September 2018, online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/sep/13/greece-refugees-lesbos-moria-camp-funding-will>.

¹⁸ By contrast, *The Longest Run* (2015), an observational film centred on two teenage Kurdish refugees in a Greek prison awaiting trial for people trafficking, eschews the Eurocentric benefaction trope and individuates its young protagonists by showing details of their quotidian routine, phone calls home, and growing friendship. See Austin 2017.

Hospitality and dehumanisation: *Fire at Sea* and *Imagining Emmanuel*

The act of hospitality is inevitably predicated upon unequal power relations (as are otherwise contrasting acts of interrogation, control and refusal). Even the poor islanders of Lesbos were better off than the refugees arriving on their shores. A similar polarity in relative comfort is encoded into the structure of *Fuocoammare / Fire at Sea* (2016), another island-based film, shot by Gianfranco Rosi on and around the tiny Italian territory of Lampedusa, 79 miles from the Tunisian coast.¹⁹ The documentary opens with an intertitle stating that 400,000 migrants have landed on the island in the past 20 years, and another 15,000 have died in the attempt. It then alternates between scenes of quotidian life on the island (a family eating, a woman listening to the radio, two boys playing together) and sequences of overloaded ships in urgent need of rescue by the Italian navy, and the subsequent processing of refugees.²⁰ The gulf between these two spheres of action endows otherwise unremarkable moments with new meaning, calling attention to the relative comfort of islanders who might be judged poor by another metric. Moving between the two worlds is Dr. Bartolo, a vital fulcrum, figure of moral commitment, and the only participant to offer a commentary on the situation.

The film's opening scene is of 12-year-old Samuele climbing a tree to find a small branch from which he can make a catapult. This is followed by audio of the island's monitoring station receiving a desperate call for help from someone on a sinking boat with 250 people on board.²¹ The oscillation from safety on land to death and deprivation at sea (and, by implication, in the migrants' countries of origin) asserts how basic human rights such as shelter, food, and safety are denied the thousands attempting to reach Europe from Africa. But the fact that the distinct lifeworlds of islanders and migrants hardly ever touch becomes a metaphor for the refusal of European politicians and citizens to recognize and respond to those in need. This separation is inscribed into the editing of *Fire at Sea*, but explicit judgement or condemnation of the islanders is deliberately avoided.²² Rosi elaborates:

Before, when they arrived on the island, there was interaction between the islanders and the migrants. That doesn't happen anymore, because [their boats] are intercepted in the middle of the sea. They're brought to Lampedusa, usually at night. [...] In the [migrant reception] centre they get identified, searched, have their first picture taken, are given clothes. [...] Then, they are taken to Italy, where another journey starts in order to [seek] the status of political refugee. [...] I want, in this film

¹⁹ Carr notes that "In 1997 Lampedusa became a destination for undocumented migrants from North Africa for the first time." Following the collapse of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia and Gaddafi's overthrow in Libya, both in 2011, many more Tunisians, Libyans, and migrants from sub Saharan Africa began arriving on the island. With a booming oil economy Libya had become a migration destination in its own right, but was the beneficiary of a 5 billion dollar "friendship pact" with Italy in 2008, and had been promised a further 50 billion Euros by the European Commission in 2010 for its part in a "cooperation agenda" to curtail African migration to Europe. Carr 2015, 78-79; Andersson 2014, 14.

²⁰ In practice, an "escalating criminalisation of sea rescue" has occurred since the end of the Italian government's year-long Operation Mare Nostrum in October 2014 and its replacement with (EU-funded) Frontex's Operation Triton, such that "being rescued [now effectively means] *being captured and contained*". Tazzioli 2018, 5, italics in original.

²¹ Later a local radio station reports that 200 people were rescued from the boat, while 34 bodies were found.

²² Rosi states: "When I make a film I like to close the door as much as I can, instead of opening it up and saying the whole thing. Michael Moore likes to open up the door. I close the door, more and more and more." Kingsley 2016b.

to underline even more the fact that these two worlds never meet and never interact. They barely touch each other, [...] even on the island itself. (Minervini 2016.)

One third of Lampedusa's population of 6,000 watched the finished film in the main square, and as Rosi observes, many seemed unaware of the appalling events happening just offshore. "Many people were so moved by the movie, and they were crying, and they said they didn't know about all this. Somehow I felt like Lampedusa was a metaphor for Europe: we all know, we all read the newspaper, but no one really has a *knowledge* of this." (Kingsley 2016b, italics in original.)

The film's representation of both the migrants and their Italian rescuers effectively dehumanizes the members of each group as anonymous and more or less indistinguishable. Rosi talks of "aliens going to save aliens".²³ But these dehumanizations proceed in notably different ways. In one sequence, Italians in white protective suits, facemasks and blue rubber gloves are shown helping people to board a naval vessel. The protective clothing is clearly a practical measure but it also ascribes the threat of contagion to the presence of the migrants. Once again *Fire at Sea* makes no judgement here, but in tracking the rescue Rosi's camera verges on the intrusive, and is only able to register slim traces of subjectivity among the migrants. They seem to be silent throughout boarding the ship, later sat beneath plastic sheeting in a speeding patrolboat, and then descending from a bus, wrapped in the glittering foil of thermal sheets. A slow pan across scores of refugees as they sit quietly outside the reception centre renders them an anonymous collectivity. Previously, in the patrolboat, one African man is seen speaking, but his words are lost in the noise of the wind and the motor. Another looks exhaustedly into the camera, which is spatially and symbolically separated from him, filming through the cabin window. (His act of returning the filmmaker's gaze is charged with vulnerability, but also challenges optical and symbolic asymmetry and constitutes a mute demand for recognition.²⁴ Another return of the gaze occurs at the reception centre, when a young man, the last of several individuals shown having their photograph taken by the authorities, turns to look at the 'wrong' camera, that of the filmmaker. His unsmiling and inscrutable look momentarily conflates both visual apparatuses as disciplinary instruments of power and control.

An hour into the film Rosi shows Dr. Bartolo talking through a series of photographs of overcrowded boats, and the ill and injured. "It's the duty of every human being, if you're human, to help these people. [...] I have to witness awful things: dead bodies, children. [...] All this leaves you so angry. It leaves you with an emptiness in your gut, a hole." Here benefaction is not self-serving but an act that knows its own limitations as well as its ethical necessity. The penultimate sequence of *Fire at Sea* shows the rescue of an open-topped boat crowded with refugees. Four dehydrated and very ill young men are hauled on to a dinghy which takes them to the naval ship. Then dead bodies in black bags are loaded on to the ship's deck, and Rosi films the distraught relatives of the dead, before framing three shots of people lying where they died in the hold of the traffickers' boat.²⁵

²³ Rosi in Talu 2016.

²⁴ This moment recalls Charles H. Cooley's notion of the looking-glass self: "For Cooley, the looking-glass self has three major characteristics: our imagined image of how we appear to another person, the judgement that we imagine he or she makes of our appearance, and our feelings about ourselves inspired by this imagined judgement, such as pride or shame". Charmaz and Rosenfeld 2006, 36, citing Cooley 1902. See also Boltanski 1999, 39.

²⁵ "I know it's very difficult to show death and is it ethical? [...] But this is what I want to do. I want people to know that this is unacceptable. The world has to know this. [...] That was the last scene that I shot, not because I thought the film was finished, but because I didn't have the strength anymore to hold the camera after that." Rosi in Minervini 2016.

Rosi has lamented the difficulty of spending time with any immigrants, as they typically stay on the island for only one or two nights before being taken to the mainland. This contributes to their massification and anonymisation in the film, a process which he sees as analogous to that of their classification and processing by the Italian authorities.

As a filmmaker, it was very frustrating because time is my only tool. Time allows me to know people, to get involved in their life and be able to film that. With the migrants I never had that chance. I filmed them like aliens, a group of people that move without individuals, an organic mass that moves in a place they're not allowed to be part of. (Minervini 2016.)

In this rare instance, dehumanising imagery of refugees and migrants provides the grounds for a political critique of prevailing European attitudes towards them, rather than becoming a symptom of the widespread failure to recognise the situation and pleas of the other.

The one exception to *Fire at Sea*'s failure to access asylum seekers' accounts of their own experiences takes place when a small group of Nigerian men in the reception centre give thanks to God for their safe arrival in Europe. For three minutes, while others sing, one young man chants in English a narrative of trauma and endurance:

This is my testimony. We could no longer stay in Nigeria. Many were dying. [...] And we flee from Nigeria. [...] In Sahara desert many were dying. [...] were killing many people and we could not stay. We flee to Libya. [...] And Libya was a place not to stay. We cried on our knees, 'what shall we do?' [...] The people would not hide us. And we run to the sea. On the journey of the sea, [...] passengers died. [...] A boat was carrying 90 passengers, only 13 [...] were rescued, and the rest died. Today we are alive. [...] It is risky in life not to take a risk, because life itself is the risk. We stayed for many weeks in Sahara desert. Many were dying of hunger, many were drinking their piss. All to survive. [...] We said, 'God don't let us die in the desert.' And we got to Libya, and the Libyans would not pity us, they would not save us because we are Africans. And they locked us in the prison. Many, many prison for one year. [...] Many died in the prison. Libya prison was very terrible. No food in the prison. Every day beating, no water. And many of us escape. [...] At last we enter the sea. We said, 'if we cannot die in Libya prison, we cannot die in the sea'. And in the sea we did not die.

In speaking for himself and his fellow refugees, this nameless man's testimony offers an exception to Eurocentric perspectives on the so-called 'crisis', and an urgent reminder of the humanity of the thousands risking death on the hazardous journey to Europe. Judith Butler has noted the double significance of the notion of humanness. It functions as a coercive norm, a shifting and selectively allocated entitlement that defines itself against those it excludes as less than human. But it is also a necessary term for affirming the rights to life of those who are oppressed by the forcible operation of this norm that governs "which human lives count as human and as living [and hence grievable when lost], and which do not" (Butler 2009, 74). The Nigerian's account of death, perseverance and survival challenges the racist logics that exclude him and others like him from the category of grievable humanity.

Nevertheless, asymmetrical power relations still structure this sequence. In its attempt to "give voice" to hitherto unheard migrants, *Fire at Sea* cannot evade the inequalities that attend this endeavour. As Luke Robinson notes in a recent examination of Chinese migrant

workers' voices in Kazuhiro Soda's *Oyster Factory* (2015), despite its long history in documentary filmmaking, in particular those about marginalized peoples, "the belief that the voice is the route to subjectivity ignores the ways in which it may be a mark of objectification".²⁶ He elaborates: "Not only does the spoken word have the capacity to objectify, as with racial insults, but traces of embodied difference embedded in the voice – accent, for example – may also be used to dehumanize certain speakers in certain contexts."²⁷ An element of inadvertent objectification can be discerned in the Nigerian's heavily accented English, which marks him out as African. His voice calls attention to itself and becomes another marker of his subaltern position, rather than achieving a relative transparency through which his experience might be relayed. Thus, despite Rosi's achievements in both foregrounding and querying the institutional dehumanisation of sub-Saharan migrants on Lampedusa, his own practice cannot entirely escape a similar process, and at such moments reproduces a Eurocentric tendency to position Africans as "ethnographiable" others in their difference from a white European norm.²⁸

If hospitality, as in the actions of Dr Bartolo, the islanders of Lesvos and others, may at times implicitly call for gratitude on the part of the recipient or guest, then ingratitude, in some contexts at least, can become an act of disruption and resistance. *Les Arrivants* (Claudine Bories and Patrice Chagnard, 2009) centres on encounters between asylum seekers and members of staff at the Paris-based charity CAFDA (Coordination de l'Accueil des Familles Demandeuses d'Asile). Zahra is eight months pregnant and has had to cope with imprisonment, rape and separation from her partner on the tortuous journey from Eritrea to France.²⁹ Her complaints about being given a bedroom on a different floor from the nearest kitchen or bathroom are given short shrift by caseworker Caroline, who is clearly distressed by the demands placed on her and her limited power to help. As Judith Still has argued, all too often "focus on the generosity of the host becomes a focus on the duties of the guest", which include presumed gratitude or some form of reciprocity. But ingratitude can both foreground and resist "the imbalance of power that creates the need for hospitality in the first place" (Still 2010, 13). For the Roman philosopher Seneca, "qualified ingratitude", such as that exhibited by Zahra, "reveals that the gift is truly a gift". "[N]othing gives a better demonstration that [generosity] cannot lean on interest [reward or return] [...] than the kind deed given to the poor, to the dying person, to the traveler, to the stranger, to the unknown person." By contrast, the goal of munificence is "the triumph of the donor [...] the crushing of the other, not the relieving of his [sic] pains."³⁰ Zahra's relative ingratitude confounds this oppressive logic, rejecting the position of the obliterated other who is granted significance only as a recipient of the generosity of power.

The illegality industry's processing of refugees and migrants upon their arrival in Europe (case interviews in *Les Arrivants*, health checks and photographs in *Fire at Sea*, criminal proceedings in *The Longest Run*) is also a key theme in Thomas Østbye's *Imagining Emanuel* (2011), which centres on the travails of an undocumented Liberian in Norway. The scrutiny, discipline and control endured by asylum seekers and clandestine migrants or 'illegals' form part of the unmarked and unremarked upon Žižekian objective violence that sustains the European system. It is this systemic violence that Østbye interrogates in

²⁶ Robinson, forthcoming, 2018, page TBC, print p3.

²⁷ Robinson, (same page). Robinson is drawing here on Rangan 2015, 103.

²⁸ The term is Fatimah Tobing Rony's, in 1996, 7, cited in Rangan, 2011, 150.

²⁹ Kingsley writes: "Of those migrants who crossed the Mediterranean in 2015, Eritreans formed the fourth-largest national group, behind Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis. [...] [Eritrea is] a totalitarian state [characterised by] indefinite national service that allows the government to treat each civilian as a modern-day serf for the duration of his or her life." Kingsley 2016a, 42, 44.

³⁰ Goux 2002, 149,150, citing Seneca.

Imagining Emanuel. The film is aesthetically distinct from the observationalism of *The Longest Run*, *Fire at Sea* and *Les Arrivants*, and deploys a politicised self-reflexivity that at moments recalls Godardian counter-cinema. Emanuel Agara's dilemma is that of the 'non-person' in a procedural web based on monitoring and regulation. Without a passport or any other documentation he is effectively another "sub-citizen", deprived of full legal rights and subsisting in a bureaucratic, social and emotional limbo (Hyndman 2000, cited in Chouliaraki 2012, 15.)³¹ His internal exclusion within Norway prohibits him not only from working but also from leaving the country.³² Having fled the civil war in Liberia with his mother at the age of ten, Agara stowed away on a ship from Ghana after his mother died. Fifteen years later he is trapped in Norway, unable to return home. His situation is complicated by the fact that the Norwegian authorities insist that he is not Liberian at all, but Ghanaian.

Østbye approaches Agara's case obliquely. *Imagining Emanuel* traces how both documentary practice and the illegality industry in which it plays a part deploy "ways of classifying human beings [that] interact with the human beings who are classified" to shape lived experience (Hacking 1999, cited in Andersson 2014). The film opens with a carefully lit closeup of Agara in right profile, standing silently and slightly uncomfortably in a film studio. Quiet voices and shuffling are heard on the soundtrack. The image cuts to a shot of the rear of his head, then to his left profile, and someone holds up a laminated contrast card just in front of his face. Agara seems uncertain whether or not to turn and look at the camera while a male voice, calm but impersonal and slightly cold, says in Norwegian: "You are in a studio and you are being filmed for the first time. We are looking at you. What do we see? What are we looking for? Skin? Age? Two scars on your chin? Identity? Your identity is unknown. What is unknown?" Extreme closeups show a small pockmark on Agara's forehead and then the short curly black hairs on his head, before a cut to a frontal closeup. The voice continues: "Does identity consist of those aspects of a person that remain the same, over time? You, who call yourself Emanuel, do you look like yourself?" This two-minute sequence not only foregrounds the process of making a documentary, but also offers a succinct reminder of the common technologies and routine procedures shared by filmmakers and the modern state's legal apparatus as both test veracity and attempt to produce the human subject as knowable. In each instance, verbal statements are supplemented by the logic of what I have called the *surface-depth hermeneutic*, which seeks indices of a person's interiority (history, character, state of mind, emotions) in the visible evidence offered by their face and body.³³

The remainder of *Imagining Emanuel* is divided into ten chapters, which proceed to probe Agara's story and the responses it elicits. Chapter one, "illustrated story", is set in Liberia around 1990. The camera pans slowly across pristine trees and vegetation as the voiceover speculates about Emanuel as a boy: "most probably he is in the forest playing [...] Later he will recall this day as it was the first time a car entered the village, and he was the one to spot it." Sounds of automatic rifle fire and a cut to handheld video footage of armed fighters running down a road shatter this prelapsarian moment. The narrator then tells in a passionless voice of Agara and his mother and sister fleeing their village under the cover of night, of losing his sister in the chaotic boarding of a ship to Ghana, and of his mother later falling ill and dying in the street. Chapter two, "storyteller" returns to the studio

³¹ Compare David Herd's phrase for immigration detainees in the UK who are barred from working or receiving an education, and are reduced to "a life [...] held brutally in suspense". Herd 2016, 143.

³² A representative of the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration explains that two attempts to return Emanuel to Ghana failed because, having been flown there from Norway, he was not allowed to enter the country.

³³ Austin 2016. Later in the film the unseen narrator gestures to the related issue of credibility when he comments on the range of interviewees asked about Agara's case: "As the people talk they are being judged one against the other. What makes us consider one as more trustworthy than another?"

and shows Agara standing in medium longshot as he talks, in English, of his mother's death and of swimming to a ship in the harbour and stowing away in the rudder cavity for five days without food or water before giving himself up to the crew. Subsequent sequences show him walking the streets in Norway, asking without success for food and money. A police officer recounts that Agara was refused a Norwegian residence permit and was imprisoned for 9 months awaiting deportation. The narrator states wryly: "Even though the identity of Emanuel is unknown, he belongs in a place. It's time to look at this place. What can it tell us about Emanuel?" The place is Trandum detention centre, near Oslo, where, as a lawyer explains, in the mid 2000s detainees suffered routine sleep deprivation and were woken every 30 minutes during the night. In a slow pan the camera circles the tiny cell where Agara was kept in solitary confinement for two weeks. The police log for June 24 2007 is superimposed on the image, recording details of Agara's position when sleeping in the cell, a toilet break, and one supervised walk.

In the final sequence of the film Agara talks about the dilemma of being an undocumented person in a society that demands documentation. "I can explain my life story. That is my identity. My identity is what I speak with my mouth." It is this life story that is consistently disbelieved by the Norwegian authorities, but which is validated in a second film, which functions as a sort of sequel. *Out of Norway* (2014), co-directed by Østbye and Agara himself, jettisons Østbye's self-reflexive aesthetic for something more like a video diary, partly shot by Agara. The film explains that *Imagining Emanuel* was awarded a human rights award of 50,00 kroner (around \$6,000) from the Norwegian government. In a fascinating twist, Agara uses some of the money to buy false travel papers. Unable to return to Liberia without a valid passport, he secures a fake one and travels to Germany, from where he flies to Nigeria, before travelling on to Liberia. This reversal of both Agara's initial flight from Africa and the direction of travel for thousands of migrants and refugees constitutes a symbolic rejection of Europe's failure to accommodate the needs and human rights of those seeking asylum and work. The film registers Agara's unhappiness with a life spent in limbo ("I'm afraid to live in Norway") and documents his return to his original village, to a job as a small-scale farmer, marriage, and the birth of his daughter. Throughout the Liberian passages, he extolls the joys of living in Africa, unafraid, able to work, and surrounded by beneficent nature. Africa is "the home of nature, lovely home"; "I'm created by nature in Africa [...] this is my home." Thus Agara's self-portrayal not only reverses the trajectory from Africa to Europe but also inverts the plenitude / lack binary that, to recall Rajaram, structures discursive constructions of the two continents.

Conclusion

While sometimes conflated for reasons of political expedience, the designations 'refugee' and 'migrant' have also often been arranged in a hierarchy which elevates the 'deserving' refugee above the 'undeserving' migrant. This distinction is often a racialized one, which dehumanises and criminalizes economic migrants from sub Saharan Africa in particular. However, such designations are best understood as porous and overlapping. Patrick Kingsley argues: "While someone [...] may be best described as an economic migrant when he sets out from Nigeria, after a few weeks in Libya [typically involving imprisonment violence, and hunger] he will be someone more akin to a refugee." (Kingsley 2016a, 52). The lack of a watertight distinction between refugee and migrant allows for all *the films discussed here to be understood as manifestations of Andersson's "illegality industry"*. Whatever their details and differences, from the benefaction trope and marginalisation of refugee experiences in *Ode to Lesvos*, to *Fire at Sea's* interrogation of the institutional dehumanisation of migrants on Lampedusa, to the *self-reflexive consideration of documentary practice in Imagining Emanuel*, these films take their place within the

constellation of interventions, policies and procedures that surrounds every migrant or refugee attempting to enter Fortress Europe.

It is also vital to situate such human movements within the wider economic functioning of the continent, and its relations with Africa and Asia in particular. In *Out of Norway*, Agara's return home offers a clue to one possible response to the urgent question of how to address the refugee and migrant 'crisis', that is the long term goal of improving opportunities in the countries of origin. Žižek writes:

The more we treat refugees as objects of humanitarian help, and allow the situation which compelled them to leave their countries to prevail, the more they come to Europe, until tensions reach boiling point, not only in the refugees' countries of origin but here as well. [...] refugees are the price humanity is paying for the global economy. [...] Europe will have to reassert its full commitment to providing means for the dignified survival of refugees. [...] However, the most difficult and important task is a radical economic change that abolishes the conditions that create refugees. The ultimate cause of refugees is today's capitalism itself and its geopolitical games. [...] So let's bring class struggle back - and the only way to do it is to insist on the global solidarity of the exploited and oppressed. (2016, 9, 101-103, 110)³⁴

While Žižek admits that this call to action may seem utopian, tentative new alliances are being forged between undocumented immigrant labour and local trade unions, in both Europe and the US. The Italian journalist Vittorio Longhi has detailed some of these attempts at "redirecting the politics of the fight between locals and migrants against the xenophobic cultural hegemony which instead is aimed at dividing and opposing them." (Longhi 2014, 45) In another Italian study, Anna Curcio and Gigi Roggero (2018) quote a worker at the giant IKEA warehouse in Piacenza:

The bosses gave me this disease, racism. I had become racist towards my workmates from other countries: the bosses tell Moroccans that Tunisians are better, then they tell Tunisians that Egyptians or Romanians are better than them. But we united around the struggle against exploitation, and along the way we also defeated racism. Now we know we're all the same because we're all workers.

Now is the time for documentary practitioners to start mapping and celebrating these new interracial mobilisations and acts of resistance.

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³⁴ Hein de Haas has argued that: "a slight increase in GDP leads to a corresponding increase in emigration, since more people have the money to pay the smugglers. [...] It's only when average salaries rise to around a quarter of the average salary in the developed world that a country's net migration levels start to decrease." De Haas 2007, summarised in Kingsley 2016a, 54.

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